

ABSTRACT

THESIS: PREDICTING RISKY BEHAVIOR FOR EMERGING ADULTS: THE ROLE OF GENDERSPECIFIC AND GENDER NON-SPECIFIC NORMATIVE PERCEPTIONS

STUDENT: Kanila Brown

DEGREE: Master of Science

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: May 2021

PAGES: 61

Problem: Emerging adulthood is a developmental period characterized by an increase in risky behaviors including risky drinking, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors. These risky behaviors have been linked to serious health, social, and academic consequences. Research has linked normative (mis)perceptions of risky behavior to self-reported risky behavior. However, these studies did not examine whether gender-specific or gender non-specific normative perceptions were significantly better predictors of risky behavior. **Purpose:** To address this gap in the literature, this study examined self-reported risky behavior (i.e., binge drinking, marijuana use, prescription misuse, risky sex acts [RSA] and risky anal sex acts [RAA]) as predicted by the perceived frequency of these behaviors (i.e., descriptive normative perceptions) by the average adult and by same-gender adults among college emerging adults (EAs). **Methods:** A sample of college EAs, aged 18-25 were recruited online to complete the online survey. A series of count model analyses were conducted to examine gender-specific and gender non-specific descriptive

normative perceptions as predictors of personal risky behaviors. Results: Binge drinking and RSA were significantly predicted by gender-specific and gender non-specific normative perceptions. Additionally, marijuana use was significantly predicted by gender-specific normative perceptions. Due to the non-normal distribution of the data, comparison of regression coefficients was not appropriate. Therefore, whether there was a significant difference between the gender-specific or gender non-specific models was not tested. Conclusion: These findings suggest that when identifying effective interventions for risky drinking, marijuana use, and risky sex acts, it may be important to address normative (mis)perceptions.